

## **ECRI's Round Table in Lithuania Constitution Hall – Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania Vilnius, Thursday 12 June 2003**

### **BRIEFING PAPER**

ECRI's Round Table in Lithuania is part of a series of national Round Tables in the member States of the Council of Europe, which are organized in the framework of ECRI's Programme of Action on Relations with Civil Society.

The reasoning behind this new Programme of Action is that racism and intolerance can only be successfully countered if civil society is actively engaged in this fight: tackling racism and intolerance requires not only action on the part of governments (to whom ECRI's recommendations are addressed), but also the full involvement of civil society. ECRI attaches great importance to ensuring that its anti-racism message filters down to the whole of civil society, and also to involving the various sectors of society in an intercultural dialogue based on mutual respect.

The main themes of this Round Table are: (1) ECRI's report on Lithuania; (2) challenges facing Lithuania in the field of asylum and immigration; (3) national legislation to combat discrimination; and (4) the situation of Roma/Gypsies in Lithuania.

In its recently published [Report on Lithuania](#), ECRI acknowledges that over recent years, Lithuania has taken a number of steps to combat racism and intolerance. This includes the adoption of a programme aimed at promoting the integration of the members of the Roma/Gypsies communities into Lithuanian society and the granting of eligibility and voting rights in elections to local self-government bodies to non-citizen permanent residents.

At the same time ECRI observes that problems of racism and intolerance persist and are particularly acute *vis-à-vis* the members of the Roma/Gypsy community, although they also concern asylum-seekers and refugees, notably Chechens and Afghans. The existing legal provisions aimed at countering manifestations of racism and racial discrimination, including in the media, are not always adequate to address these phenomena and are rarely applied. This situation reflects a lack of adequate awareness within Lithuanian society as a whole of the existence of racial prejudice and discrimination in the country, of the ways in which these phenomena manifest themselves and of the need to combat them.

All those issues will be discussed with representatives of the responsible

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governmental agencies and the victims of discrimination in the light of [ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No.7](#) on national legislation to combat racism and racial discrimination, **Lithuania's Programme for the Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society** and recent changes in **Lithuania's asylum and refugee policies**. Particular emphasis will be also put on the future creation of a **specialised body in combating racism and intolerance**, as recommended in ECRI's last report on Lithuania.

ECRI hopes that an open debate among all relevant actors on these extremely important issues will help to identify together effective ways of better implementing existing initiatives and will also give impulses for further reform in Lithuania.